



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Cornell Graduate Student, Anuar Morales, Receives 2008 Michael Villani Award

By Joe Ogrodnick

Geneva, N.Y.: Anuar Morales, a graduate student in entomology at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station is the recipient of the 2008 Michael Villani Award.

The Villani Award is presented annually to a graduate student in the Department of Entomology. Villani, who was a member of the Geneva entomology faculty, established the \$1,000 award before his death in 2001 from pancreatic cancer. Charley Linn, senior research associate in the department, said, "Mike set up the award to provide funds for graduate students to help them with their research efforts. There was, however, a unique aspect to the selection process that was stipulated by Mike - the recipient was to be chosen by the permanent technical and academic staff rather than the faculty."

Morales, a master's degree candidate working with entomology assistant professor Daniel Peck, was selected in part for his collegiality in the lab. "Beyond his high level of technical expertise in insect pathology, Anuar has brought to our lab a boundless willingness to contribute to the success of all of our projects," said entomologist Daniel Peck, who is Morales's major professor.

Peck also noted how Morales's research builds on discoveries made by Villani. "One aspect of Anuar's research focuses on broadening our understanding of how soil insects orient to soil-borne antagonists, such as pathogens," he said. "Using his hallmark x-ray approach, Mike Villani showed how Japanese beetle grubs can perceive and avoid fungal entomopathogens. Anuar has been able to repeat those results and build on them to reveal the same capability with other soil insect pests and a broader range of antagonists, including insecticides and other fungi."

Morales has limitless ways to make use of this experience in the future as he moves on to PhD research and then into a career in plant protection, Peck went on to say. "He has a genuine interest in conducting research that will have a direct benefit to pest management practitioners but at the same time carry relevance to a range of crops and managed systems, temperate and tropical."

"I am very honored to have received this award," Morales said. Mike Villani, along with being an exceptional scientist in the area of soil-insect ecology, was an exceptional person as well. The award is especially meaningful to me since soil-insect ecology is also the area in which I am conducting my research, and in doing that research I am using some of the same techniques Mike did. To receive this award and to be associated in some way with Dr. Villani is one of the proudest moments in my career."

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Anuar Morales, flanked by Charlie Linn (left) and Dan Peck (right), is presented with the 2008 Michael Villani Award certificate.

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